



## Berlin Now: The City After the Wall

By Peter Schneider

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**Berlin Now: The City After the Wall** By Peter Schneider

**A smartly guided romp, entertaining and enlightening, through Europe's most charismatic and enigmatic city**

It isn't Europe's most beautiful city, or its oldest. Its architecture is not more impressive than that of Rome or Paris; its museums do not hold more treasures than those in Barcelona or London. And yet, when citizens of "New York, Tel Aviv, or Rome ask me where I'm from and I mention the name Berlin," writes Peter Schneider, "their eyes instantly light up."

*Berlin Now* is a longtime Berliner's bright, bold, and digressive exploration of the heterogeneous allure of this vibrant city. Delving beneath the obvious answers?Berlin's club scene, bolstered by the lack of a mandatory closing time; the artistic communities that thrive due to the relatively low (for now) cost of living?Schneider takes us on an insider's tour of this rapidly metamorphosing metropolis, where high-class soirees are held at construction sites and enterprising individuals often accomplish more without public funding?assembling a makeshift club on the banks of the Spree River?than Berlin's officials do.

Schneider's perceptive, witty investigations on everything from the insidious legacy of suspicion instilled by the East German secret police to the clashing attitudes toward work, food, and love held by former East and West Berliners have been sharply translated by Sophie Schlondorff. The result is a book so lively that readers will want to jump on a plane?just as soon as they've finished their adventures on the page.

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## Editorial Review

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\*Starred Review\* The author of *The Wall Jumper* (1984) presents his collected musings about the city that has inspired and perplexed him since he was first seduced by West Berlin as a young man in the early 1960s. Berlin is not traditionally beautiful, he notes; it is a hodgepodge of architectural fits and starts, like the aging Fernsehturm and the ubiquitous concrete Plattenbau apartments of the old East Berlin but also the contested and commercialized new Potsdamer Platz. It is a city scarred by its history but also proud of its weirdness, its resilience, and its condition of constant change; a city in which a bitter debate over what to do with an asbestos-filled East German government building culminates in a massive piece of performance art. Berlin today struggles with racial politics and the same gentrification challenges that confront many major cities, as Schneider explores in insightful essays on the Turkish district of Neukölln and the increasingly South German streets of Prenzlauer Berg. But it is also a city that, for now at least, continues to be a magnet for the young, creative, and poor, to whom it offers cavernous apartments and an unparalleled club scene (which the author dutifully explores, having gotten from his grown children a few tips on where to go and how best to enjoy himself). In the end, Schneider seems to suggest, liveliness is far more important than beauty. --  
Brendan Driscoll

## Review

“Wonderful.” ?*Simon Kuper, Financial Times*

“[Schneider] is right in saying that in recent decades no other city ‘has changed as much--and for the better--as Berlin,’ lauding the sense of openness that has drawn immigrants, revived the shattered Jewish population and made the city a magnet for a creative class that is also luring cutting-edge businesses.” ?*Ian Johnson, The New York Times*

“Illuminating . . . *Berlin Now* is at its best when Schneider illustrates his findings or perspectives with secondary points of view . . . Often though, Schneider's impressions are so strong they don't need any added color. His recollection of arriving in West Berlin for the first time in 1962 stands out due to its fusion of topographical detail . . . and personal opinion, especially regarding the city's bad food and the natives' brusque manner. Just as good is his fish-out-of-water account of his visit to Berghain, a nightclub decreed the best in the world by *The New York Times*. Schneider, in his seventies, is no techno-loving hipster, but in order to cover all bases of contemporary Berlin he ventures out to sample its legendary nightlife, albeit with earplugs. Schneider is thus an authority on Berlin, not simply by virtue of his being a resident but because he fully immerses himself in the place . . . Page after page yields surprising nuggets of wisdom . . . Thanks to Sophie Schlondorff's expert translation, Schneider's wry descriptions and private reflections ring true, and he emerges as both an informative and personable guide, and, most crucially, one brimming with enthusiasm for his subject . . . his final picture is a detailed and absorbing portrait of an unfinished city that has all the dynamism of a complete one.” ?*Malcolm Forbes, The New Criterion*

“*Berlin Now* is stuffed with glorious anecdotes about the rows over architecture, infrastructure, sexuality and morality in a city forced to weld itself together since 1989.” ?*Peter Millar, The New Statesman*

“Schneider deserves plaudits for this engrossing book, which attempts what's practically impossible--describing the essence of what makes Berlin *so Berlin*. Applause also is abundantly deserved by translator Sophie Schlondorff, whose masterful skills enable Schneider's writing to transition seamlessly, and vibrantly,

into English.” ?David Hugh Smith, *The Christian Science Monitor*

“*Berlin Now* is a gathering of illuminations, a button box of participant observations, each chapter like a new day, sometimes picking up again on a theme but often shifting gears and taking a turn to go examine something new. Schneider is an old-school flâneur, a psychogeographer who can screw down very close upon a subject--an old Jewish cemetery, a door in the Wall through which East German border police would snatch graffiti artists on the other side, the bust of Nefertiti--then he will step back to take in the *genius loci*, gestalts both during Wall time and after Wall time, an integration with properties not derivable from the summation of its parts, as Nathaniel Webster might say. Now in his seventies, Schneider seems never to have missed a day under the spell of Berlin . . . Schneider is just this side of a provocateur. He is an investigative journalist/geographer, probing to the point of sticking his finger in the wound, with the best intentions. He is a dark joker and a sensualist; he likes a good jape . . . as much as he appreciates a perfect tomato, a sly appreciation of life's little pleasures.” ?Peter Lewis, *Barnes & Noble Review*

“In 30-odd short pieces on the city's architecture, its immigrant communities, its famous night life and its sexual mores, Mr. Schneider tries to answer this question: If Berlin is not beautiful, why is it so beloved? To his credit, he avoids the easy answers . . . Mr. Schneider is at his best when explaining the debates about Berlin's public architecture and how they inevitably become debates about Germany's history.” ?Nicholas Stang, *The Wall Street Journal*

“In this enlightening collection of essays, Berlin resident Schneider unearths the city's charms and hazards. Journalist Schneider (*Eduard's Homecoming; The Wall Jumper*) first came to Berlin from Freiburg as a student in 1962 and has since seen enormous changes, the most shattering of which was the tearing down of the Berlin Wall after the earthshaking events of November 1989. Apart from the subsequent building projects that have transformed the city, such as the development of Potsdamer Platz and the shifting of the historic *Mitte* (middle) toward what was once East Berlin, Schneider is intensely focused on the East-versus-West dynamic. He describes East Berliners as dragging their Communist ideals and Stasi legacy, and resenting Western democratic standards, and he says that East Berlin women are ‘self-confident and divorce-happy,’ as more of them have been forced to work than their Western counterparts. Moreover, the once-ostracized Turkish ‘guest workers’ now make up a largely assimilated minority, with Vietnamese, Russians, and Jews nestled in far-flung neighborhoods, despite lingering episodes of racist violence. Covering the city's grim history as well as its current night clubbing, these essays reveal an authentic city that does not bother being more lively than beautiful.” ?Publishers Weekly

“An intriguing journey through Berlin by a longtime interested observer. Ungainly, amorphous, overrun by armies, clotted by construction, inhabited by uneasy neighborhoods of ethnic niches (including Turks, Russians, Vietnamese and Israelis), and still affordable to starving artists and all-night partiers, Berlin is a wildly attractive tourist spot, not least due to its dark history. In these amusing, knowledgeable essays and dispatches, German novelist and journalist Schneider (*Eduard's Homecoming*, 2000, etc.), who first came to the city as a student in the early 1960s to claim exemption from serving in the Bundeswehr (German defense forces), unearths much that is fascinating and even beautiful about Berlin. He examines the conversion of various sections of the city and warehouses, industrial ruins and other structures in what was formerly East Berlin--e.g., Potsdamer Platz, the new Berlin Brandenburg Airport and newly gentrified Prenzlauer Berg. Deeply engaged with friends and colleagues both East and West, Schneider has written extensively on the ramifications of the removal of the Berlin Wall, not only in the physical revelation that Berlin's great historic center and grand buildings were all located in the East, but also in the souls of ‘Ossi’ and ‘Wessi’ remnants, now cohabitating a little like oil and water. In his autobiographical essay ‘West Berlin’ (‘the name . . . refers to a city that no longer exists’), the author reaches back into the student movement of the late 1960s and the building of the ‘wall of the mind’ mentality he wrote about in his novel *The Wall Jumper* (1984). In ‘The Stasi Legacy,’ he writes poignantly of the poisonous effect the secret police had on even married couples

informing on each other. Berlin's 'culture of remembrance,' he writes, has also been transformed--e.g., the multitude of Holocaust commemoration exhibits and memorials paying quiet tribute to a vanished community. A seasoned journalist conveys the charms and perils of this 'Cinderella of European capitals.'" *Kirkus*

#### About the Author

**Peter Schneider** was born in Lübeck, Germany, and has lived in Berlin on and off since the 1960s. He has taught at many American universities—including Stanford, Princeton, and Harvard—and is the author of more than twenty books, including *The Wall Jumper* and *Eduard's Homecoming* (FSG, 2001). He has also written for newspapers, including *Der Spiegel*, *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *La Repubblica*. **Sophie Schlondorff** is a translator, editor, and writer. Originally from New York, she grew up bilingual in English and German, and is fluent in French and Italian. She is a graduate of Yale University and has been living abroad for more than a decade in Paris, Rome, and Berlin.

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